

29 Chairs: Bauhaus to Eames

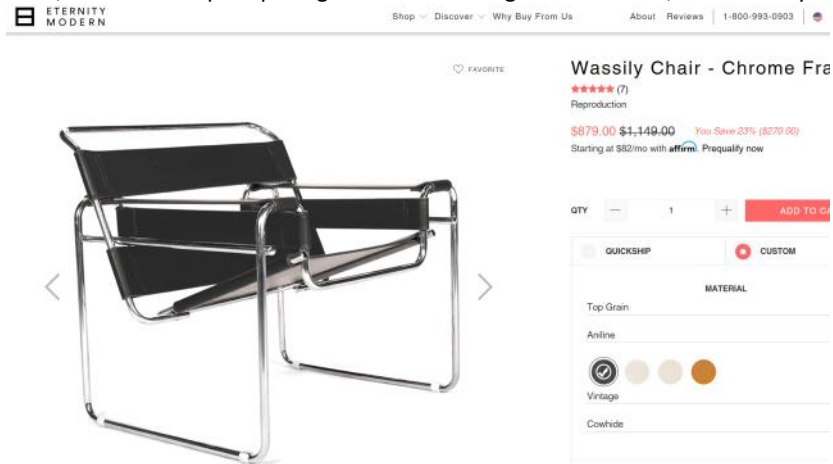
Monday, April 14, 2025 3:19 PM

Today

Keith Hemenway Animation

Chairs. Thonet to Eames

Then, Bauhaus: Gropius' protégé Marcel Breuer graduated 1925, immediately became furniture design teacher and built Wassily chair:

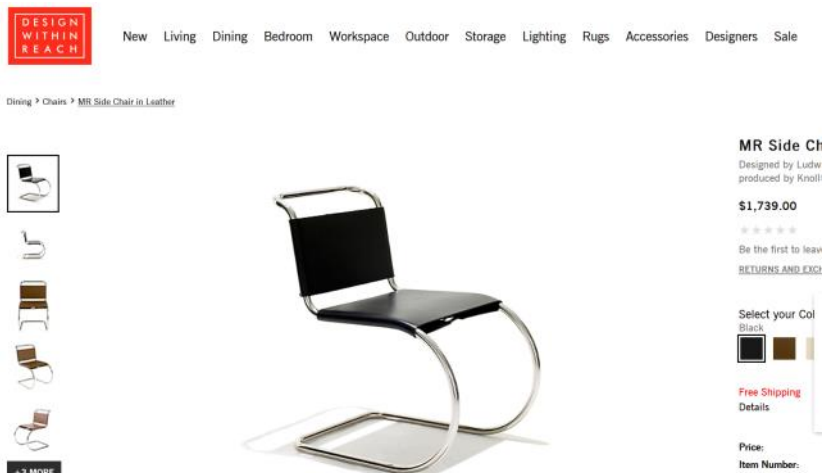


"This was the first technical innovation in furniture making since Thonet invented bentwood 65 years earlier"
Now I sit me down, pg 121.

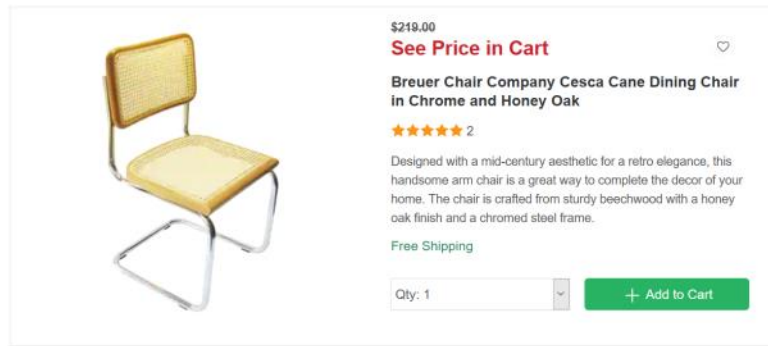
This chair had huge impact. Bauhaus was big in architecture, and now had a model in furniture.

My parents bought one. Was uncomfortable, and they quickly sold it. It's still iconic, and available.

Tube steel furniture was a short fad, <10 years. Reminded everybody of hospitals and dentists. Still, some designs lasted:

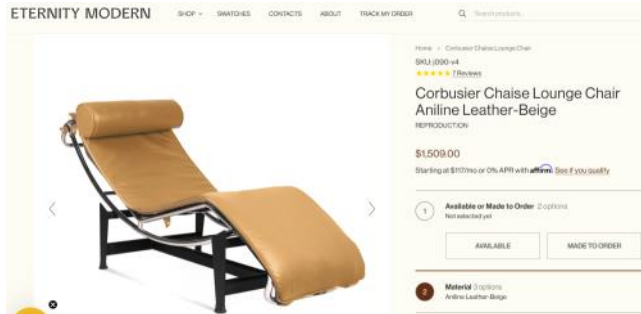


MR10 by Mies van der Rohe. 1927. Expensive to manufacture, and easy to tip forward.
Still Bauhaus, but looks Art Deco. Both were between WW I and II.



Marcel Breuer again. 1928 or so.

Le Corbusier liked bentwood better. Designed some chairs, inspired others.



Alvar and Aino Aalto, Finnish architects, husband and wife. Paimio lounge chair



Designed for a tuberculosis sanatorium, 1929. This one is actually comfortable.

The Aaltos then influenced Eero Saarinen, who partnered with Charles and Ray Eames to make the Reading Chair:



The Organic Chair – a small and comfortable reading chair – was developed in several versions for the 1940 'Organic Design in Home Furnishings' competition organised by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. With its sculptural shapes, the design was ahead of the times. But due to the absence of suitable manufacturing techniques, the armchair never went into production. Not until 1950 did it become possible to manufacture and market organically shaped seat shells in large quantities, as exemplified by Charles and Ray

Museum of Modern Art in New York. With its sculptural shapes, the design was ahead of the times. But due to the absence of suitable manufacturing techniques, the armchair never went into production. Not until 1950 did it become possible to manufacture and market organically shaped seat shells in large quantities, as exemplified by Charles and Ray Eames's famous Plastic Armchair or Saarinen's Tulip Chair.

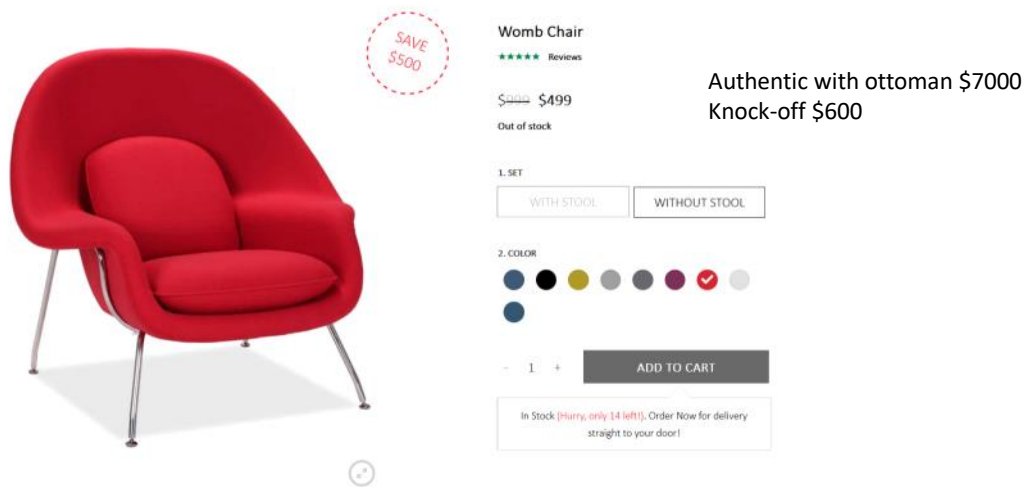
However, as the young designers soon discovered, the technology required for the three-dimensional molding of plywood shells was not yet available. While it was possible to produce shells manually for the prototypes, it became clear that considerable technical advancements would be necessary before the chair could be mass produced.

Recognizing the innovative, ground-breaking approach adopted by Eames and Saarinen, MoMA's jury of experts – which included Marcel Breuer and Alfred Barr, the founding director of the museum – awarded their design first prize.

From <https://www.vitra.com/en-us/magazine/details/the-organic-chair>

WWII killed development of the chair. It wasn't manufactured until 2004, by Vitra, for \$2000

Eames then moved away. Saarinen went on to design the Womb chair in 1948 with a fiberglass shell. My mother loved this chair. I spent my childhood curled up in it watching TV.



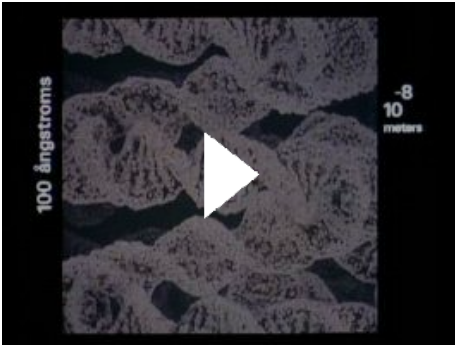
Charles and Ray Eames, husband and wife, members of Mid Century Modern/Organic design movement. Pioneered fiberglass and molded plywood seating. Many designs for huge furniture manufacturer Hermann Miller (Grand Rapids, MI). Eames Intro: <http://www.eamesoffice.com/eames-office/charles-and-ray/>

Eames introduce the lounge chair on national TV, the Home Show, in 1956 . Long, and difficult for a feminist to watch. [America Meets Charles and Ray Eames](#)





[The Eames Creative Process](#)



They made a number of educational films as well. My favorite is Powers of Ten: [Powers of Ten™ \(1977\)](#) (9 minutes)

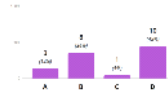
Clicker:

1. Nope, not interested
2. I've already seen it, no thanks
3. I've already seen it, sure, happy to see it again
4. Yes, let's watch it!

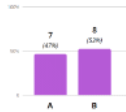
Eames were big in the Organic movement: Incorporated user experience philosophy (the good host, providing comfort) with pioneering manufacturing process; formed plywood shells + upholstery

You have probably sat in this at an airport:

- 92% a) Yes I have, it's great
 61% b) Yes, it's like any other chair
 30% c) Nope, haven't seen it
 30% d) Yes, I don't like it



A B C D



If you didn't like it, are you a) tall > 5'10" b) Less than 5'10

Reasons for dislike:

Shakes when somebody else sits down.

Not big enough

Too hard, not soft enough

Smells bad

Material doesn't age well

Back to back, heads collide

Too close side to side

No way to lay down

No lumbar support

Encourages slouching. Have to sit back

Eames Tandem Sling, by [Herman Miller](#). Still available new. Aluminum frame, vinyl fabric. 2 seater \$5000 up to 7 seats X2 rows (back to back) for \$30K. Two seater, refurbished with leather, \$6K on Etsy. I always try to sit in these at airports; they fit me.